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## **War and Peace in Contemporary India**

Rudra Chaudhuri

*Director, Carnegie India, New Delhi, India; Senior Lecturer, Department of War Studies, King's College London, London, United Kingdom*

Address: Department of War Studies, Strand, London, WC2R 2LS.

[Rudra.Chaudhuri@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:Rudra.Chaudhuri@kcl.ac.uk)

Rudra Chaudhuri is the Director of Carnegie India and a Senior Lecturer at the Department of War Studies, King's College London. He works primarily on South Asian diplomatic and military history. Rudra is the author of *Forged in Crisis: India and the United States since 1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). He is currently writing a book on the *Global History of the Indian Emergency, 1975-1977*.

## War and Peace in Contemporary India

This Special Issue looks at the importance of institutions and the role played by international actors in crucial episodes of India's strategic history. The contributions trace India's tryst with war and peace from immediately before the foundation of the contemporary Indian state to the last military conflict between India and Pakistan in 1999. The focus of the articles is as much on India as it is on Pakistan and China, its opponents in war. The articles offer a fresh take on the creation of India as a regional military power, and her approach to War and Peace in the post-independence period.

Keywords: India; war and peace; Pakistan; China

On 29 September 2016, the Indian Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) announced that the Indian army had 'conducted surgical strikes' against terrorist 'launch pads' located 'along the Line of Control' (LoC).<sup>1</sup> The LoC separates Indian and Pakistani administered Kashmir.<sup>2</sup> The objective of the strikes, the DGMO made clear, was to pre-empt terrorist groups from attacking and infiltrating India.<sup>3</sup> In the days and weeks that followed, columnists and analysts wrote brazenly of how the attacks signalled the coming of age of a new India. Government spokespersons underlined that the India of today has left 'behind the policy paralysis of yesteryears

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<sup>1</sup> 'Press statement by DGMO,' *Press Information Bureau*, 29 September 2016, available at: <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=151242>

<sup>2</sup> Note: In India, Indian-administered Kashmir is known and referred to as the state of Jammu and Kashmir. In Pakistan, Pakistani-administered Kashmir is known and referred to as *Azad* (free) Kashmir. For a note, see: Christopher Snedden, *Kashmir: The unwritten history* (New Delhi: HarperCollins 2013), 2.

<sup>3</sup> 'Press statement by DGMO,' *Press Information Bureau*, 29 September 2016, available at: <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=151242>. For a brief background on the 'surgical strikes', see: Nitin A. Gokhale, 'The inside story of India's 2016 "surgical strikes"', *The Diplomat*, 23 September 2017, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/the-inside-story-of-indias-2016-surgical-strikes/>

and the so-called “strategic restraint”.<sup>4</sup> Commentators and political scientists have long argued that India has historically been wary about the use of military force. ‘Strategic restraint’, they argue has been the crying creed of Indian political leaders, dating back to the time of Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India’s first prime minister.<sup>5</sup>

The journalistic writing around the surgical strikes and political leaders’ portrayal of the same suggests that Indian strategic history can be effortlessly divided into two periods: pre and post surgical strikes. In the case of the former, restraint was supposedly the predominant norm that informed choices on the use of force. In the case of the latter, a post-restraint normative regime is said to be in the making. These distinctions, mooted not only by columnists, but also by close observers of strategic affairs<sup>6</sup>, ignore the select revisionist and academic accounts of Indian diplomatic and military history. Such works, in fact, make it clear that Indian leaders were hardly cagey when it came to the use of force.

In his magnum opus, *War and Peace in Modern India*, published in 2010, the author, Srinath Raghavan, more than convincingly shows that Nehru could be considered a ‘liberal realist’ who was hardly mesmerised by restraint. His approach to the use of force was shaped as much by institutional factors as they were by diplomatic and political ones depending on the crises under examination.<sup>7</sup> In a painstakingly researched analysis of British and American interests in South Asia, published in 2013, Paul McGarr clearly shows how India – between the time of Nehru

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<sup>4</sup> Ram Madhav, ‘A Different Leader’, *The Indian Express*, 30 September 2016

<sup>5</sup> For a review, note: Sunil Dasgupta and Stephen P. Cohen, ‘Is India Ending its Strategic Restraint Doctrine?’ *The Washington Quarterly* 34/2 (Spring 2011) 163-64. Also see: Sunil Dasgupta, ‘The Fate of India’s Strategic Restraint,’ *Current History* 111/744 (April 2012), and Stephen Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (New Delhi: Oxford University press 2001), 104-7.

<sup>6</sup> See: Nitin A. Gokhale, *Securing India the Modi way: Pathankot, Surgical Strikes, and More* (New Delhi: Bloombury 2017), 1, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Srinath Raghavan, *War and peace in Modern India: A strategic history of the Nehru years* (New Delhi: Permanent Black 2010), 12-25.

and his successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri – learnt to calibrate her strategic choices during the early Cold War in accordance with the changes in international approaches to South Asia.<sup>8</sup> The use of force was hardly anathema to leaders like Nehru. These works make clear that the pre and post restraint paradigms make very little sense. There is a clear gap between the accepted and popular reading of Indian military and diplomatic history, and the excellent academic works on the same. In fact, whether or not ‘strategic restraint’ is even a useful term in the study of Indian diplomatic and military history is debateable.<sup>9</sup>

In some ways, this Special Issue seeks to address this gap. Each of the articles presented in this Issue looks at the importance of institutions and the role played by international actors in crucial episodes of India’s strategic history. In doing so, they address how changing international contexts and debates within countries like the United States and Britain affected and shaped India’s advance in times of crises. The selection of papers trace India’s tryst with war and peace from immediately before the foundation of the contemporary Indian state in 1947 to the last military conflict between India and Pakistan in 1999. Equally, the focus of the articles is as much on India as it is on Pakistan and China, its opponents in war. In sum, this Special Issue offers its readers a somewhat more complicated story of India’s strategic past, sourced from a wide range of archival sources

The introduction has been divided into two parts. The first briefly surveys the existing works on Indian diplomatic and military history. The second introduces the reader to the central arguments made in the selection of papers in this Issue.

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<sup>8</sup> Paul M. McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent, 1945-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013), 2-8.

<sup>9</sup> See: Rudra Chaudhuri, ‘Indian “strategic restraint” revisited: The case of the 1965 India-Pakistan War’, *India Review* 17/1 (2018), 55-60.

## The Current State of Play

Diplomatic and military history in and on India is a relatively unexplored subject area. In fact, archival-based works on post independent India are rare. It is one of the reasons why the prominent historian Ramachandra Guha authored *India After Gandhi* in 2007.<sup>10</sup> The fascination with the Colonial era has, to a large extent, drawn history departments away from serious works in and on post independent India. As one notable author puts it, ‘historians of modern South Asia remain resolutely focused on the encounter with the British Empire’. ‘Temporally,’ he continues, ‘they remain hesitant to look beyond the moment of decolonisation in 1947’.<sup>11</sup>

For the longest time, undergraduate university syllabi in India, such as at Delhi University, did not consider the history and politics of India in the post 1947 period. The story of India as told and read at Oxford and Cambridge rarely included works on independent India. In the narrower turf of diplomatic and military history, the state of the field is underdeveloped to say the least. Until recently, there was no comparison to Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper’s magnificently researched treatise, *Forgotten Armies*, that tells the story of Britain’s Asian Empire during the Second World War.<sup>12</sup> The first and only serious international history of India in the Second World War was published as late as 2016. It shows, as the author argues, not only ‘what India did for the war’, but also ‘what the war did to India’. It firmly establishes that the ‘South Asia of today’, as the author underlines, ‘is in very many ways the product of India’s Second World War’.<sup>13</sup> The need to better understand India and

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<sup>10</sup> Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi: The history of the world’s largest democracy* (New Delhi: Macmillan 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Srinath Raghavan, *The most dangerous place: A history of the United States in South Asia* (New Delhi: Penguin 2018), xvii.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten armies: Britain’s Asian Empire and the war with Japan* (London: Penguin books 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Srinath Raghavan, *India’s War: The making of modern South Asia 1939-1945* (London: Allen Lane 2016), 6.

South Asia in the post-Second World War and post independence period prompted universities like King's College London and Oxford to create contemporary India programmes - though only in the last decade or so. The lack of focus on contemporary India is even more startling when one considers that the Boden Chair in Sanskrit was created at Oxford in 1832<sup>14</sup>.

Until the 1990s, an argument could be made that the archives in India were largely inaccessible, making it hard to write the history of the post independence period. Hence, the major works on the diplomatic history of South Asia were authored by American and British academics and practitioners-turned-scholars. Excellent as they were, the narrative and the arguments they advanced were largely based on a very close reading of U.S. State Department papers and British Foreign Office records<sup>15</sup>. On the other hand, a serious examination of Indian decision-making at times of war and peace based almost wholly on select access to Nehru's private papers presented only one side of the story, as it were. They were published in the 1970s and 1980s<sup>16</sup>. In addition, a wide selection of memoirs and biographies on India's military engagements with both Pakistan and China serve as a fantastic set of

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<sup>14</sup> For a note on Oxford and Kings' history with the study of India see their relative websites: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/international-oxford/oxfords-global-links/asia-south-and-central/india?wssl=1> and <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/kii/aboutus/index.aspx>.

<sup>15</sup> See: Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the periphery: The United States, India and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press 1994); Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies 1941-991* (Washington DC: National Defence University Press 1992); Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan 1947-2000: Disenchanted allies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2001); and Anita Inder Singh, *The limits of British influence: South Asia and the Anglo-American relationship 1947-56* (London: Printer Publishers 1993). For an exceptional study of the 1971 India-Pakistan War based on an exhaustive list of interviews, see: Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India and the creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1990). For a later work that relies mostly on American declassified sources, see: Howard B. Schaffer, *The limits of influence: America's role in Kashmir* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press 2009).

<sup>16</sup> The three-part biography of Nehru by Sarvepalli Gopal is an exceptional example of such work. For his analysis of India and Nehru in the post independence period, see: Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography, Volume two: 1947- 1956* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 1979) and Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography, Volume three: 1956-1964* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 1984).

sources, taking the reader straight to the frontlines of diplomatic and military decision-making. Yet, and as is often the case with memoirs, they can be self-serving. They are, perhaps, best read alongside the many telegrams and reports written by a variety of actors present at the time. Further, an excellent selection of official histories offers a crucial resource for various Indian military engagements since 1947<sup>17</sup>. However, such histories tend to focus more on tactical and operational aspects, and say little about the diplomatic and political sides of the conflict at hand.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, archives in India not only opened, but also became places of academic frenzy, electrifying scholarly and collaborative works by authors from different parts of the world<sup>18</sup>. A select range of books and articles published in the first eighteen years of this century makes this point clear. They are, in many respects, the first set of international histories of contemporary India<sup>19</sup>. Further,

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<sup>17</sup> See: S.N. Prasad and Dharam Pal, *History of operations in Jammu and Kashmir (1947-8)* (New Delhi: Ministry of Defence 2005); P. B. Sinha and A. A. Athale, *History of conflict with China 1962* (New Delhi, Ministry of Defence 1992); S. N. Prasad and U. P. Thapliyal, *The India-Pakistan War of 1965: A History* (New Delhi: Natraj Press 2011); and S. N. Prasad and U. P. Thapliyal, *The India-Pakistan War of 1971: A History* (New Delhi: Natraj Publishers 2014).

<sup>18</sup> For a short review see: Suhasini Haider, 'Troubling Truths,' *Mint*, 31 May, 2014, available at: <https://www.livemint.com/Leisure/9BSsZ9tJCZ6Ge8fuIOse7I/Essay--Troubling-truths.html>. For an excellent example of such collaborative works, see: Amit R. Dasgupta and Lorenz M. Luthi (ed.), *The Sino-Indian War of 1962* (New Delhi: Routledge 2016).

<sup>19</sup> See: Raghavan, *War and Peace*; Andrew B. Kennedy, *The international ambitions of Mao and Nehru: national efficacy beliefs and the making of foreign policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012); Srinath Raghavan, *1971: A global history of the creation of Bangladesh* (Boston: Harvard University press); McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia*; Rudra Chaudhuri, *Forged in crisis: India and the United States since 1947* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014); Raghavan, *India's War*; Raghavan, *The most dangerous place*; Manu Bhagavan, *The peacemakers: India and the quest for one world* (New Delhi: HarperCollins 2012). Also see: Tanvi Madan, 'With an eye to the east: The China factor and the US-India relationship, 1949-1979', *University of Texas* (2012); Yogesh Joshi, 'Between principles and pragmatism: India and the nuclear non-proliferation regime in the post-PNE era, 1974-1980', *International History Review* (2018); Elizabeth Leake, 'The great game anew: US Cold War policy and Pakistan's North-West Frontier, 1947-65', *International History Review* (2013); Jayita Sarkar, 'The making of non-aligned nuclear power: India's proliferation drift, 1964-1968', *International History Review* 37/5 (2015). For an excellent and recent international and economic history see: David C. Engerman, *The price of aid: The economic Cold War in India* (Boston: Harvard University Press 2018). For an excellent account of India's Wars based mostly on secondary sources, see: Arjun Subramaniam, *India's Wars: A military*



scholars have moved past surveying the endless number of ministerial deposits at the National Archives in New Delhi to look at alternative, and sometimes richer, sets of sources in different and remoter parts of India<sup>20</sup>. The field of diplomatic and military history based on archival material in India and elsewhere is slowly expanding. This Special Issue includes a selection of articles to further develop the scope of arguments in this arena as a whole. They offer fresh insights based on archival work, as well as a closer conceptual reading of Indian, British, and American decision making at times of war and peace in contemporary India. In each of their unique ways, they emphasise the importance of international concerns and experiences to the manner and method in which India dealt with crises from the time immediately before the birth of the contemporary Indian state to a little after it acquired nuclear weapons.

### **This Issue**

The first article – by Vipul Dutta<sup>21</sup> – looks closely at the creation and evolution of the Staff College in British India. The college was established in 1907 at Quetta, in present-day Pakistan. Works on the institutional history of the Indian military are rare. There is no work comparable to Brian Bond's magnificently detailed account of the British Staff College<sup>22</sup>. While Stephen Cohen's book (first published in 2001) on the Indian army stands out as a classic in the field, the work is in need of an update<sup>23</sup>. Further, archival documents released in the past two decades beg for a re-write of the

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*history, 1947-1971* (New Delhi: HarperCollins 2016). For other comprehensive and equally excellent accounts, see: Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions since 1947* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press 2002) and Dilip Hiro, *The Longest August: The unflinching rivalry between India and Pakistan* (New York: Nation Books 2015).

<sup>20</sup> See: Berenice Guyot-Rechard, *Shadow states: India, China and the Himalayas, 1910-1962* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Vipul Dutta, 'Indian' Staff College: Politics and Practices of Military Institution Building in Twentieth Century India'.

<sup>22</sup> Brian Bond, *Victorian Army and the Staff College, 1854-1914* (London: Methuen Publishing 1972)

<sup>23</sup> Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: It's contribution to the development of a nation* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 2001).

Indian military's institutional history. For example, Steven Wilkinson's more recent and meticulous study of civil-military divergence between India and Pakistan is a milestone project. He makes a strong case for how 'political institutionalisation of the Congress Party' and 'specific coup proofing and balancing measures' adopted by the Indian state deterred and dissuaded military leaders from toppling civilian authority<sup>24</sup>. As important as this work on the Indian army is, it leaves room for a serious consideration of the military staff college in the development of the Indian state. In his article, Vipul Dutta returns to the moment when 'India's Camberley' – as the Staff College in Quetta was referred to – came into being. Dutta examines the processes and changes adopted at the Staff College across the two World Wars.

The analysis offered by Srinath Raghavan does well to compliment Dutta's work on military institutions.<sup>25</sup> For Raghavan, the point is quite simple, if one were to try and understand India as an Asian power in the contemporary world, it is necessary, he argues, to return to the contributions made by her in the Second World War. Similarly, as he notes, it is critical to appreciate how the War changed India and shaped her advance in the post-independence period. As stated earlier, there is no comparable work on India and the Second World War. Whilst Raghavan's larger arguments around the industrialisation of the Indian state are comprehensively made in his book<sup>26</sup>, this article focuses primarily on the expansion of the Indian army and the establishment of India's military industrial base.

The first two articles – by Vipul Dutta and Srinath Raghavan – are broadly about the creation of institutions, and the economic, infrastructural, and military transformations that took place in British India because of the Second World War.

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<sup>24</sup> Steven Wilkinson, *Army and nation: The military and Indian democracy since independence* (Boston: Harvard University Press 2015), 8-9.

<sup>25</sup> Srinath Raghavan, 'Building the Sinews of Power: India in the Second World War'.

<sup>26</sup> Raghavan, *India's Wars*, 1-6

Taken together, they make clear how institution-building and war-fighting experiences between 1907 and 1945 helped create a regional military power. The following four contributions, on the other hand, focus on how international actors dealt with this regional power and her chief foes, China and Pakistan, in a series of conflicts between 1962 and 1999. The Issue does not consider the First Kashmir War. Works on the 1948-1949 conflict and the international aspects of the same are well covered in excellent and relatively recent revisionist accounts<sup>27</sup>.

Paul McGarr's contribution presents the first serious study of Britain's approach to the 1962 Sino-Indian War<sup>28</sup>. McGarr shows how and why Britain was hesitant to be drawn into this conflict. The Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) and the Foreign Office (FO) were divided on the question of who was to blame for the outbreak of war. The mandarins in the FO, McGarr shows, argued that the war was 'forced on the Chinese'. The CRO, on the other hand, sympathised with the Indian government. The CRO officials better understood the compulsions of domestic politics on Nehru's democratic government, making accommodation, McGarr proposes, harder than is often suggested. Rudra Chaudhuri's article on the 1965 India-Pakistan War focuses on the international aspects of the crisis.<sup>29</sup> The 1965 War is perhaps the least studied conflict in South Asia<sup>30</sup>. Why it broke out is a question that requires further introspection. Chaudhuri argues that the role played by British Prime

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<sup>27</sup> For a review of the most recent archival based work, see: Rakesh Ankit, *The Kashmir conflict: From Empire to the Cold War 1945-1966* (London: Routledge 2016); Rakesh Ankit, 'Britain and Kashmir, 1948: "The arena of the UN"', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 24/2 (2013), 273-290.

<sup>28</sup> Paul McGarr, 'The Long Shadow of Colonial Cartography: Britain and the Sino-Indian War of 1962'. Note: For an excellent survey of works on the 1962 war and a revisionist take on the same, see: Raghavan, *War and Peace*, 227-308

<sup>29</sup> Rudra Chaudhuri, 'Just Another Border Conflict: The Rann of Kutch and the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965'.

<sup>30</sup> For a survey see: Rudra Chaudhuri, 'Indian "strategic restraint" revisited.' From a Pakistani perspective, a notable contribution can be found in: Farooq Bajwa, *From Kutch to Tashkent: The Indo-Pakistan War of 1965* (London: Hurst 2013).

Minister Harold Wilson is central to understanding why Pakistani President Ayub Khan took the decision to risk war with India. In doing so, Chaudhuri offers the first international explanation for the outbreak of War, and how such factors shaped Indian decision-making in a post-Nehru India.

Christopher Clary's contribution on the 1971 India-Pakistan War looks closely at the importance of motivated biases, which he shows shaped U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and U.S. President Richard Nixon's approach to the crisis<sup>31</sup>. Constant comparisons made by these leaders to the civil war in Biafra, Clary underlines, made it impossible for them to comprehend the emergency at hand. In his meticulously researched article, Clary not only demonstrates how such biases misfired, but also how they contributed to the division of Pakistan and the creation of the independent state of Bangladesh. John Gill's article on the 1999 India-Pakistan War serves as an essential survey of a conflict fought under the shadow of nuclear weapons<sup>32</sup>. Whilst archival or primary source material is hard to come by in a conflict as recent as the one in Kargil, Gill closely considers the risks of conventional escalation between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan.

Taken together, these articles offer a fresh take on the creation of India as a regional military power, as well her approach to war and peace in the post-independence period. Each of the latter four articles – by McGarr, Chaudhuri, Clary,

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<sup>31</sup> Christopher Clary, 'Tilting at Windmills: The Flawed U.S. Policy toward the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971'.

<sup>32</sup> John. H. Gill, 'Provocation, Conflict and Restraint under the Nuclear Shadow: Kargil and the Indo-Pakistani War of 1999'. Note: For a review of existing works, see: Sumit Ganguly and Paul Kapur, *India, Pakistan and the Bomb: Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press 2010); Vipin Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era: Regional Powers and International Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2014), 94-120; Walter Ladwig, 'Indian Military Modernization and Conventional Deterrence in South Asia', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 38/5 (2015), 729-72 and Evan Braden Montgomery and Eric S. Edelman, 'Rethinking Stability in South Asia: India, Pakistan and the Competition for Escalation Dominance', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38/1-2 (2014), 159-82.

and Gill – deal with India's military engagements since 1947, and emphasise the role and importance of international actors and changing international contexts. In sum, they offer to further develop and expand the intellectual scope of Indian diplomatic and military history.

The hope is that this Special Issue such prompts deeper interrogations of a field that is in dire need of recovery from populist and popular caricaturing. If even a small number of students of contemporary Indian history are able to refer to this Issue and at least question the simple picture of India as a state apparently wedded to the idea of strategic restraint, it would have achieved its objective.